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Women In Utah History

Patricia Lyn Scott, Linda Thatcher

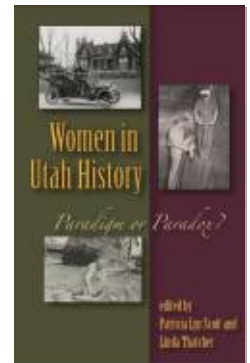
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Introduction

Linda Thatcher and Patricia Lyn Scott

The chief goal of this book is to integrate Utah women of all ethnic and religious backgrounds into the broader field of women's studies. Readers will find that these historical essays show women in Utah as sharing much with other American women, particularly in the West—in other words, as not unique. But they are also diverse and distinctive—in other words, not as expected.

The title *Utah Women's History: Paradigm or Paradox?* recognizes the stereotypes normally associated with Utah's largest group of women: Mormon, polygamous, Caucasian, under-educated, male-dominated, etc. On the one hand, Utah women are seen as a paradox (contradictory to the national norm) for embracing polygamy and submitting to hierarchal Mormon Church authority. On the other hand, they can be seen as paradigm (an example or model) for forging their own way with self-reliance and industry. Perhaps the paradox is that Utah women were both representative of national women (a paradigm) and distinctive. Few realize that Utah was the second territory to grant women the franchise (1870), and Utah's women often sustained themselves and their families both economically and emotionally for long periods of time, while their husbands were away on church assignments or dividing their time among multiple households. Julie Roy Jeffrey wrote concerning polygamy: "With its peculiar tensions and freedoms, polygamy did, of course, shape the Mormon female life on the frontier. Mormon women were different from women on other frontiers in a number of ways which were related to their religion. Yet they also shared with other pioneer women common frontier experiences and even common ideas about woman's place in the world. To be a Mormon woman on the Utah frontier was, therefore, to be both the same as, and different from, pioneer women elsewhere."¹

Utah was also a mixing ground of cultures. Native American women of many tribes led lives that having changed little over centuries, were shattered within a generation when a great flood of white settlers washed over their traditional territories. Mormon missionaries proselyted in European countries,

and new members journeyed to Utah from Great Britain, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries by the thousands. Emigrants who continued to embrace their traditional religions followed from Italy, Greece, and Asia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, brought for economic reasons, not religious ones, to work in Utah's mines and industries.

By taking a historical perspective, these essays capture the process of the social, religious, political and economic changes that Utah women experienced. In so doing, it is the first booklength attempt to appraise Utah women of all religions, ethnicities, and social classes. Such an approach, we believe, will move the history of Utah's women into the academic mainstream of women's history. Although Utah history is rife with female stereotypes, we believe that the depth and variety of involvement of Utah women in the life of the state will surprise readers.

TWELVE THEMATIC APPROACHES

The book is arranged thematically and explores varied women's activities such as agriculture, education, law, literature, and the arts. Each chapter focuses on a particular period, usually identified in the title. The dates are not meant to be all-inclusive. Underlying each chapter is our keen recognition that Utah women played an important but largely invisible—by today's standard—role in Utah's history. This book allows their contribution to be documented and celebrated.

The dominant stereotype associated with Utah women, is the subject of the book's first chapter: "Polygamous and Monogamous Mormon Women: A Comparison" by Jessie L. Embry, associate director of the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, Brigham Young University, and Lois Kelley, a graduate student in history at Utah State University at the time of her death. This practice put Mormon women at odds with their American sisters. While they considered plural marriage a God-given commandment and believed it was a Constitutionally guaranteed exercise of religious freedom, American women in general were horrified. Harriet Beecher Stowe viewed polygamy as "a slavery which debases and degrades womanhood, motherhood, and family."²² American legislators agreed with them. The authors discuss briefly the colorful and unique pre-Utah history of this practice and its complex and increasingly intense legislative and judicial contest, resulting finally in the Mormon Church's withdrawal of approval for the practice. Their focus, however, is neither political nor religious but domestic. How did plural families live their lives, conduct their courtships, arrange their households, share the work, raise their children, and, finally, disentangle those households to conform to federal legislation? Embry's and Kelley's chapter is based on autobiographies and diaries from the participants and, interestingly, on two series of interviews and oral histories conducted with participants during the 1930s and with the adult children of polygamists during 1976–82.

Embry and Kelley explore stereotypes concerning polygamy and sources of discord in polygamous families—such as the unequal division of

financial resources, living arrangements, shared goods and equipment, and personality. However, the chapter balances this discussion with descriptions of several instances of harmony and love within plural families. Some of the questions that they address are: “How did Mormon women react to these events [the Manifesto announcing an end to polygamy in 1890]? How did they feel about sharing their husbands? What motivated them to say yes (when they did)? And then when that policy changed, how did they feel about giving up the practice of plural marriage?”

“Innovation and Accommodation: The Legal Status of Women in Territorial Utah, 1850–96” is written by Lisa Madsen Pearson and Carol Cornwall Madsen—an attorney daughter and a historian mother. The authors find that the main influences on the legal status of women in Utah territory were “the liberalizing tendencies of frontier development, and most important, the necessity of protecting Mormon control and practices, including plural marriage, and ultimately defending them against the counter measures of the federal government.” Utah Territory was mired from its beginning with legal problems that arose from conflicts between federal and local courts, and Utah Territory’s effort to reject common law and polygamy. Pearson’s and Madsen’s chapter examines the many years of conflict and conciliation that it took for Utah and the federal government to arrive at an agreement so that Utah could finally obtain statehood.

“Conflict and Contributions: Women in Churches, 1847–1920” by John Sillito, university archivist at Weber State University, broadens the book’s religious focus beyond Mormonism, documenting religion’s important role for most women in Utah’s history. Despite a stereotype of Utah as exclusively Mormon, “the zeal of American Protestantism” readily launched missions throughout the Mormon stronghold. Protestants enriched education in Utah through several academies and schools, usually headed by men but staffed by devout women. “Mormon-controlled, territorial schools were woefully characterized even by the *Deseret News* in an 1855 editorial as having teachers who ‘had no other qualifications excepting they were out of employ,’ and also by overcrowding, inadequate facilities, and high tuition,” observes Sillito. As a result, Mormons were willing to take a chance on turning their children over to non-Mormons to be educated.

Various churches also promoted early social, medical, and charitable work in Utah. The Episcopal and Catholic churches made important contributions to Utah’s medical care by opening St. Mark’s Hospital in 1872 and Holy Cross Hospital (the first hospital founded in the United States by the Sisters of the Holy Cross) in 1875. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, non-Mormon churches and schools were prolific in Utah. But as public education improved and polygamy was officially outlawed, the Protestant missionary and education effort lost its momentum and many schools closed, leaving Episcopal, Catholic, and Presbyterian institutions to add their enduring contributions to Utah’s religious landscape.

“Ethnic Women, 1900–1940” is a summary by Helen Z. Papanikolas, a Greek-American whose efforts to reclaim Utah’s ethnic minorities were monumental. She sketches the experiences of American Indians, African Americans, Balkans, and Asians from 1900 to the 1940s. Papanikolas’s chapter especially provides a tangible sense of the transitions of immigrants. They built solidly traditional homes; preserved, often with heroic efforts, traditional values, and launched a new generation of “hyphenated” Americans, who inevitably cherished some of these values but relinquished others. Not well recognized at the time was the great bond forged among immigrant women by the similar circumstances they experienced after arriving in Utah. Most left their homelands reluctantly for a new land—sometimes to marry a husband whom they did not know—to live in a strange community, often isolated from their fellow countrymen and customs and facing lives of hard work and discrimination. Often only dire poverty in their native countries and prospects of an even bleaker future motivated them to make the long journey to America. Papanikolas uses census records and oral histories to examine immigrants’ roles in communities, the impact of federal immigration laws, hostility toward their cultural groups, and the difficulties of the Depression years.

“The Professionalization of Farm Women, 1890–1940” by Cynthia Sturgis, a teacher, discusses the changes in rural Utah women’s roles from producer to consumer between 1890 and 1940. Strongly influencing this change was the domestic arts program offered by Utah Agricultural College (Utah State University) in Logan. Inaugurated in 1903, the school of home economics focused on improving young women’s skills in the home. The university’s extension program also disseminated educational programs at the grassroots level throughout the state, and such publications as *Utah Farmer* (1912–97; originally the *Deseret Farmer*, 1905–1912) had sections devoted particularly to women’s concerns. Later, electricity played an even more important role in the way that rural women accomplished their daily chores. As women gained more education and as communication increased, housekeeping on the farm and in the city grew to resemble each other more closely. Sturgis notes, “The farmwife had become a ‘household manager,’ a consumer, and a believer in planning and education.”

“Gainfully Employed Women, 1896–1950” by Miriam B. Murphy, retired associate editor of the *Utah Historical Quarterly*, traces the role of women as wage earners during the nineteenth century when Utah had “a frontier economy based primarily on agriculture” to the twentieth century’s “mixed economy of a developing agricultural-commercial-industrial state.” This article refreshingly reconsiders the image of Utah’s women as housewives and farmwives. Although both of these roles were important ones for Utah’s hard-working women, they sought and accepted opportunities for paid employment in Utah’s “mixed economy of a developing agricultural-commercial-industrial state. The role of women in that transformation resembled that of women in other parts

of westerning America.” Women’s employment opportunities, which began primarily with domestic service, expanded to keep pace. By the turn of the twentieth century, national events and trends dominated Utah’s economic life. Even though Utah was not a major manufacturing state, it boasted a larger and more diverse list of manufacturers than most states of the Mountain West. Many young Utah women worked in seasonal canning operations, candy factories, textile mills, and clothing factories. Self-employed women were dressmakers, milliners, and boarding house operators. Depression-era government projects also provided significant employment to Utah women, while record numbers, like their sisters elsewhere in the nation, entered the workforce during World War II. Against this context, Murphy also discusses the Mormon Church’s traditionally conservative views on working women.

“From Schoolmarm to State Superintendent: The Changing Role of Women in Education, 1847–2004” by the late Mary R. Clark, a former doctoral student at the University of Utah, and Patricia Lyn Scott, a section manager at the Utah State Archives, focuses in greater detail on women’s contribution to education in Utah. Mary Jane Dilworth began Utah’s first school in a tent on October 24, 1847, only three months after the pioneers entered the Salt Lake Valley. In early Utah, the first public structure in most pioneer communities was a combination school/church house. The schools were an early battlefield in the national contest to end Mormon control of daily life in Utah. This chapter also discusses the role of women in public education through Mormon ward schools, private schools, and non-Mormon mission schools, the development of teacher education, increased numbers of women in the profession, the end of discriminatory pay and rules, the marked increase of women administrators during the 1990s, and finally the appointment of a women state school superintendent in 2004.

“Scholarship, Service, and Sisterhood: Women’s Clubs and Associations, 1877–1977,” by Jill Mulvay Derr, managing director of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History at Brigham Young University, analyzes the significant role of Utah women’s clubs and associations from 1877 to 1977. Derr writes: “The history of Utah women’s clubs and associations is best understood within the context of the ongoing national discussion about women’s role in the public sphere. . . . The question of appropriate roles of women emerged as a burning topic.” Clubwomen’s strategy was to espouse “the ladylike ideal” with the goal of encouraging women’s status and respect and encouraging them to seek self-improvement. Derr discusses three important time periods: 1877–1917, “when women began establishing a new network of clubs and associations”; 1917–45, “when both new and well-established organizations for women addressed the challenges of war, depression, and peace”; and 1945–77, “an age of discontent and discovery informed by the twentieth-century women’s movement.” She focuses particularly on the significant civic contributions associations of Utah women have always made to their communities.

“Women of Letters: A Unique Literary Tradition” by Gary Topping, archivist of the Catholic Diocese of Utah, explores the topic of Utah women in literature. “The harshness of frontier life, though poignantly present in early Utah, seems to have been generally less of a factor in inhibiting cultural development than elsewhere,” he comments. “An important factor was Mormonism’s characteristic gregariousness. Mormon migration and colonization were movements of an entire society rather than a diffusion of individuals. Thus, while the poet behind the plow and the historian in the haymower are to be found on the Utah frontier as elsewhere, Mormon society from the beginning sought a degree of specialization that potentially included the arts, sciences and letters.” He examines the contributions of individual writers and women’s literary societies along with their contributions to the genres of the novel, poetry and short story. Utah has produced several nationally known authors including Maurine Whipple, Juanita Brooks, Fawn Brodie, May Swenson, and Judith Freeman. Today many of the state’s nationally known authors are noted for their environment-oriented writings and include Terry Tempest Williams, Ann Zwinger, and Ellen Meloy (1946–2004), who was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in nonfiction in 2003.

“Women in the Arts: Evolving Roles and Diverse Expressions” by Martha Sonntag Bradley-Evans, associate professor in the College of Architecture and Planning at the University of Utah, surveys Utah women in dance, theater, music, the visual arts and handicrafts, motion pictures, and popular entertainment. Since the Victorian ideal encouraged cultural/artistic activities for women as appropriately “refining” activities, it is not surprising that women participated from the 1850s, beginning with Brigham Young’s organization of the Deseret Musical and Dramatic Society soon after their arrival in the valley. Unlike many conservative religious movements, Mormonism encouraged dramatics, singing, and dancing as wholesome recreations, while the later Mutual Improvement Associations had strong drama, music, singing, and dancing programs (sports were confined largely to men) that continued broad community sponsorship of such activities. Thus, Utah added to the nation’s actresses such women as Maude Adams, famous for her Broadway role as Peter Pan, and Hazel Dawn, an early Hollywood film star. Maud May Babcock, the first woman professor at the University of Utah, dominated theater and dance, directing more than 800 productions. Artists Mary Teasdel, Rose Hartwell, Florence Ware, and Myra Sawyer and a host of less well-known Utah women fine artists benefitted from the far-sighted Alice Merrill Horne’s sponsorship in 1899 of a bill that created the first state arts council in the United States.

“Women in Politics: Power in the Public Sphere” by Kathryn L. MacKay, associate professor of history, Weber State University, discusses the three major issues that activated women in the political sphere in the nineteenth century: “abolition of slavery, temperance, [and] woman suffrage.” She focuses on women’s place in Utah politics from 1847 to 2003, beginning with the suffrage

movement, women's achievement of suffrage in 1870, disfranchisement as a side effect of the polygamy fight between 1887 and 1895, and the regranting of the vote by the state constitution—but only after a monumental struggle. MacKay positions these events against their national context, noting where the Utah experience follows or diverges from national trends. MacKay brings her chapter into the twenty-first century with her discussion of former Governor Olene Walker's recent role in Utah politics.

Jessie L. Embry authors a second chapter in our book: "Women's Life Cycles: 1850–1940." Embry uses Gerda Lerner's *The Female Experience: An American Documentary* as her model. Embry proposes: "Studies like Lerner's consider that the life elements that most women share are of greatest importance and seek those patterns rather than writing from an assumption of uniqueness." To gain an understanding of Utah women's life patterns, Embry read more than three hundred oral histories and one hundred published life sketches. She discusses the "typical" life cycle (daughter, wife, childbearing and child rearing, aging, and usually widowhood), along with such variations as employment outside the home and the options available for single women.

A HISTORY OF THE HISTORY

The introduction to this book would be incomplete without a brief discussion of the project's history—in itself a glimpse of Utah women from the last quarter of the twentieth century to the present. The book traces its beginnings to April 1977 when a group of women historians and women working in history-related fields organized themselves as the Task Force on Women in Utah History of the Utah Commission for the Observance of International Women's Year (IWY). For the Utah state IWY meeting in June 1977, the task force presented a workshop that included a slide-sound lecture and a photographic exhibit.

The workshop was so successful and the relationships formed so rewarding that several of the women decided to continue their association with the formation of the Women's History Association with the dual goals of encouraging women in the history professions and also promoting the study, teaching, and writing of women's history. In 1978 the group's name changed to the Utah Women's History Association. The association's initial focus was a combination of support group and network—a place where women in history could share common concerns, network with each other, exchange ideas, and report successful methodologies. The organization also envisioned promoting women's history by organizing and sponsoring public programs and conferences on women's history and encouraging the researching and writing of women's history.³

On October 29, 1983, the first planning meeting was held at the Salt Lake City Public Library to discuss the possibility of writing and publishing a history of Utah's women. Those in attendance included: Patricia Lyn Scott, Lavina Fielding Anderson, Sharon Arnold, Peggy Lee, Helen Papanikolas,

Fred Buchanan, Lois Kelley, Linda Thatcher, Kathryn MacKay, Jill Mulvay Derr, and Lori Hefner. The editors selected were Patricia Lyn Scott and Linda Thatcher (current and incoming presidents), with Lavina Fielding Anderson as production editor and the late Cary Stevens Jones as photograph editor (Susan Whetstone has stepped into that role).

This group developed the list of topics that would form the table of contents and also proposed authors. An impressive number of outstanding Utah historians agreed to author chapters.⁴ The organization successfully applied for a grant from the Utah Endowment for the Humanities (Utah Humanities Council) to sponsor a lecture series where the chapters were presented as papers. During the fall and winter of 1985–86, all sixteen authors presented their lectures in Salt Lake City and repeated them in Utah communities outside the Wasatch Front. This series proved to be very successful with several hundred people in attendance.

For multiple reasons, the project lost momentum, but the editors never lost their belief that the eventual goal of publishing the book was a worthwhile project. In 2004 the editors regrouped and asked those authors who were still interested in participating to update their chapters. All were—all did. The chapters presented in this book are somewhat different than those initially envisioned, but they still reflect the original intent—that of telling the history of Utah's women.

Significantly, during the intervening years, several important biographical works on Utah women have been published, but no thematic book has appeared devoted to Utah women as a whole.⁵ The need for such a book envisioned during the 1970s has only become more acute with the passage of time, particularly as women's history has assumed its place in the broader historiographical landscape. This book's primary objective is to make the history of Utah's women more visible, to celebrate their achievements, to appreciate their struggles and sacrifices, and to see more clearly the work that still remains to be done.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Finally, we acknowledge with deep appreciation the individuals and institutions who made this project possible. Lavina Fielding Anderson, more than a technical editor, provided assistance and direction at crucial points of our project. The quality of this publication is largely due to her editing skills.

We also express sincere appreciation to the Utah Humanities Council, which provided the initial funding for writing the first papers/lectures in 1985. This sponsorship played a critical role in the development of the project. Cynthia Buckingham encouraged this project throughout its long gestation.

Various institutions played an important role in this project, most notably the Utah State Historical Society, which provided consistent support. We are especially appreciative of its sponsorship of the publication, thus

allowing dozens of photographs to be used and allowing the services of Linda Thatcher as an editor and Susan Whetstone as photograph editor. The society's director, Philip F. Notarianni, was not only supportive but enthusiastic about the project. Other very helpful institutional support came from the Giovale Library, Westminster College and its director David Hales; photo curator Dan Davis at Utah State University's Merrill Library; Janet Burton Seegmiller at Southern Utah University's Sherratt library; University of Utah's Special Collections at Marriott Library; Utah State archivist Patricia Smith-Mansfield and the Utah State Archives; Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City; Kennecott Utah Copper; and countless other archivists and manuscript curators throughout Utah.

We also acknowledge the support of our families, friends and institutions, who believed in this project. Thanks to them and their persistent reminders that it needed to be done, we could not give up.

Our most sincere tribute goes to our authors. In the two decades that have passed since the project began, the young enthusiasts have become seasoned scholars and the mature scholars have produced an important body of historical studies. Demands on their time have multiplied mercilessly, but their commitment to women's history and the bonds of friendship have remained intact, motivating them to move this project through its many iterations repeatedly to the head of their priority list.

It is with sorrow and gratitude that we acknowledge four who finished their journey and have passed from our circle: Lois J. Kelley and Mary R. Clark died before the project's completion was assured, leaving their work and their encouragement to able co-authors. We recognize the support of Mary's and Lois's families in allowing us to use their work in this project, especially that of Mary's daughter, Alice Clark. The remarkable Helen Zeese Papanikolas died as we were completing revisions. We will always remember her supportive e-mails, her grace in her final illness, and the stature of her legendary reputation, lent so willingly to this project. Cary Stevens Jones, the project's first photo editor, devoted hours to the project. We remember her positive nature and mourn her loss.

This is a project that would not die, because the story of Utah's women has a right to be told and shared with all Utahns. We thank John Alley and Utah State University Press for making it a reality.

NOTES

1. Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 150.
2. Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Introduction," in *Tell It All: The Tyranny of Mormonism; or, an Englishwoman in Utah, by Mrs. T.B.H. Stenhouse* (1880; reprint, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971). See also the front page of each *Anti-Polygamy Standard* starting April 1880.
3. "Origins and Purposes," *Women's History Association Newsletter*, 1, no. 1 (Winter 1977): 1.

4. The original authors were Jeffery O. Johnson, Jessie L. Embry, Lois Kelley, Davis Bitton, Cynthia Sturgis, John Sillito, Frederick S. Buchanan, Martha Bradley, Gary Topping, Kathryn L. MacKay, Jill Mulvay Derr, Miriam B. Murphy, Carol Cornwall Madsen, Helen Z. Papanikolas, Loretta Hefner, and Lisa Madsen Pearson.
5. In the past two decades, there have been four types of biographical studies published on Utah women. First, there are the traditional biographies. They include Levi S. Peterson's *Juanita Brooks: Mormon Woman Historian* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988) and Judy Dykman and Colleen Whitley's *The Silver Queen: Her Royal Highness Suzanne Bransford Emery Holmes Delitch Englitcheff, 1859–1942* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1998). Second are the compiled biographical works. They include Colleen Whitley's two volumes, *Worth Their Salt* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996) and *Worth Their Salt, Too* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2000) containing the biographical essays of thirty-four Utah women; and the Daughters of Utah Pioneers' four volume *Pioneer Women of Faith and Fortitude* (Salt Lake City: International Society of Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1998) which contains hundreds of biographical entries on women who arrived in Utah between 1847 and 1869. Third are the documentary works, the edited diaries, letters, and other records of Utah women. They include *The Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow*, edited by Maureen Ursenbach Beecher (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1995); *Letters from Exile: The Correspondence of Martha Hughes Cannon and Angus M. Cannon*, edited by Constance L. Lieber and John Sillito (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989); and *A Widow's Tale: The 1884–1896 Diary of Helen Mar Kimball Whitney*, edited by Charles M. Hatch and Todd Compton (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2003). The fourth are material culture studies which examine the lives of women through what they produced domestically. Examining quilts and their makers has become an important segment of this type of study. They include Mary Bywater Cross's *Quilts and Women of the Migration: Treasurers of Transition* (Nashville, Tenn.: Rutledge Hill Press 1996) and Kate Covington's *Gathered in Time: Utah Quilts and Their Makers: Settlement to 1950* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1997).